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ABSTRACT

Teaching has a history in which women figure prominently. Driven by need and ambition, many women worked as schoolteachers in the nineteenth century, although not necessarily attracted by the work itself. This essay focuses on Charlotte Bronte, examining the constraints and values that account for her choice of teaching as a career. It is based on two literary masterpieces: Charlotte Bronte's novel "Villette" and a biography of Bronte, (Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Bronte"). The aim is to provide reflection about conditions of teaching through the presentation of a woman's story, fictional and lived, with complex and concrete content, crafted with literary genius, and capable of bringing universal and time-bound questions to the attention of the reader. It accordingly raises philosphical issues of general human interest in a specific context: questions concerning choice and change, freedom and love, self-realization and the pursuit of goodness. In particular, it urges a consideration of the paradox that many of the structural features of teaching regarded as evils today--such as eased entry, low retention, flat careers--fit with the lives of women that are typically contingent on or coordinated with the needs of others. (JD)

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Margret Buchmann

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Abstract

Teaching has a history in which women figure prominently. Driven by need and ambition, many women worked as schoolteachers in the nineteenth century, though not necessarily attracted by the work itself. This essay focuses on one such woman, namely, Charlotte Bronte, examining the constraints and values that account for her choice of teaching as a career. It is based on two literary masterpieces: Charlotte Bronte's novel Villette and a biography of its author, (Mrs. Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Bronte) that is itself a classic of its kind. The aim of the analysis is to provide reflection about conditions of teaching through the presentation of a woman's story, fictional and lived, with complex and concrete content, crafted with literary genius, and capable of bringing universal and time-bound questions to the attention of the reader. It accordingly raises philosophical issues of general human interest in a specific context: questions concerning choice and chance, freedom and love, self-realization and the pursuit of goodness. In particular, it urges a consideration of the paradox that many of the structural features of teaching regarded as evils today--such as eased entry, low retention, flat careers--fit with the lives of women that are typically contingent or coordinated with the needs of others.

CHARLOTTE BRONTE, VILLETTE, AND TEACHING*

Margret Buchmann**

> It is totally misleading to speak, . . . of "two cultures," one literary-humane and the other scientific, as if these were of equal status. There is only one culture, of which science, so interesting and so dangerous, is now an important part. But the most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations.[1]

Picture this: A room spacious as a lofty cave, full of mysterious half-dark tunnels. It is really the enormous attic of an ugly Victorian house in North Oxford. There are thousands of books everywhere, and piles of chards and coins. A voice speaks from one of the tunnels, which are extensions of the chamber into the eaves. The voice belongs to a seated man, who appears very old with feathery hair like a halo. To Duncan Patullo, the narrator in a quintet of Oxford novels,[2] this man he has come to see for a tutorial is a mythical figure already, and he is moved to step into his world because of its appeal to his awed imagination.

Timbermill, in real life Tolkien, is the Anglo-Saxon scholar of his time. When he rises to take a keen look at his visitor, the effect of his glittering eyes on young Patullo is singular; "it was like turning a street corner and running straight into the Ancient Mariner. . . . I even felt . . . that I might be in the presence of a mage or wizard in disguise."[3] That this eerie figure

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*In an abbreviated version, this paper will be a chapter in the 1988 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education published by University of Chicago Press.

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has a vigorous, barking voice, shows refined courtesy and sensibility, and is clearly concerned about establishing a personal relationship with his visitor only adds to the enigma, and the charm. By way of dismissal, Patullo is told "There's a grammar to learn. Begin learning it;"[4] and he gets on his bicycle to go to Blackwell's bookshop, never mind his lunch at college.

Timbermill fires my imagination, too. He was a teacher because he was a man for whom existence means understanding. A fellow of three eminent Oxford colleges, this prestige meant nothing to him, nor did he take on young men to tutor out of any institutional obligation. Although he hardly ever left his attic, he had a shrewd understanding and liking for the young. "Your college", he remarked to Patullo, "has a most notable history. It also happens to be prolific in young idiots. Have a thought to that."[5] Dons consider themselves teachers, and Timbermill the leisure-time tutor excelled in the skills of the trade. During one of their tutorials, he drily asked Patullo who was staring, love-lorn, out of the window:

> "It isn't raining, is it?"
> "No, sir, it's not." . . . "I think it's going to be a lovely afternoon."
> "Then you might do worse than employ it in making an expedition to the White Horse in Uffington. You take a bus to Wantage and walk."
> "I've been there, as a matter of fact."
> "Excellent! And what do you know about the White Horse?"
> "It's not awfully like a horse. And it has something to do with King Alfred." I saw that this remark was not being favourably received.
> "Because there was a battle at Ashdown," I added on my recurrent hopeful note.
> "Absolute rubbish, Duncan. I'm ashamed of you." Timbermill . . . said this as if I was one of the few young men in Oxford worth talking to.
> "Alfred had too much on his plate to fool around digging White Horses out of unoffending downs. The Dobunni did it."
> "The Dobunni?" I echoed, blankly and stupidly. . . .
> "They were an obscure crowd who came over from Brittany in the first century. Of course they had no business to have a coinage--no business at all. But they had. And here it is." I found that I was looking at another coin. . . .
> "What does it suggest to you?"
> "Squiggles."

"Capital! You're absolutely right. But does it suggest anything to you--anything at all?"
"Well--just conceivably--that White Horse."
"Praise the Lord!" Timbermill was genuinely and deeply delighted. "My dim hope in you is restored. The horse was their emblem or totem or whatever you care to call it, and they dug it out on the down. But they'd ceased knowing they had it on their coins."
"I don't understand."
"Yes you do--or almost. That coin goes back. You can trace it across Europe. . . . Through the centuries a coinage travels as stories do--with the sun."[6]

No wonder Duncan Patullo (later to be a writer of drawing-room comedies) went to his tutorials eagerly; and, for a time, his teacher turned him into a passable scholar, mastering Germanic philology for its own sake by resolute work. Actually, Timbermill's spell was never broken; he became one of Patullo's love objects, a deep-down preoccupation throughout his life.

A man of genius, Timbermill was also a man of property, and he was a man: blessed therefore with freedom on three counts. Scholarship and teaching for him were pure ends and his work was as natural to him as breathing. Beyond the few young men he took on, he remained calmly self-sufficient in his attic. His mind could take him anywhere; it made in fact the whole world that we know from Tolkien's novels. He seemed to know as little of the struggle for the means of living as any vagabond and did not feel the tug and pull of human ties. Untroubled by conflicts of role and duties, Timbermill had a quality of innocence, living his single-minded life without any sense that the world owed him something, or that he had to make his way in it. Thus standing apart, he was an irresistible presence. Any singularity of aspect or behavior would be accepted in him on account of what he was. And being what he was--a great scholar and teacher--was all that was required of him.

Timbermill is my foil, not my subject. Now consider my protagonist Charlotte Bronte, who was a woman of genius--and a teacher because this was the only way open to her. Looking only to herself, she rejected the idea of

teaching even through writing, by which she earned, in her own words, her "wages":

> I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation. What I <u>am</u> it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. To all others I wish only to be an obscure, steady-going, private character.[7]

Retiring of disposition and given to a passionate inward life in which she never found her level, this woman committed herself at an early age to the monotonous business of instruction. And Bronte retained "the manner, which (as the cramped gait of a released prisoner recalls the days of his captivity) reminds you that it was her sad business to instruct the young."[8]

With all her spiritual and mental force, Charlotte Bronte was self-reliant only when she had to be, like a creature at bay. She had no emotional independence, nor a sufficiency of means for living comfortably. She started out life as one of six children in a poor parson's family that she remained bound to by infrangible ties. Never having been an ordinary child and cut off from society, the young remained a riddle to her. She did not know how to play, but would write plays in early adolescence. With her high seriousness Bronte also had her asperities; she was painfully reserved and, full of suppressed longings, lacked easiness and evenness of temper. In her continuing struggles for freedom and advancement, this woman was abstracted from the common lot through dark and heavy trials, though anguished love and hopelessness are hardly a release. She had a rapturous intensity of feeling and rose to surpassing insights, as revealed in this passage on friendship:

> In the matter of friendship, I have observed that disappointment arises chiefly, <u>not</u> from liking our friends too well, or thinking of them too highly, but rather from an over-estimate of <u>their</u> liking for and opinion of <u>us</u>; and if we guard ourselves with sufficient scrupulousness of care from error in this direction, and can be content, and even happy, to give more affection than we receive--can make just comparison of circumstances, and be severely accurate in drawing inferences thence, and never let self-love blind our eyes--I think we may manage to get through life with consistency and constancy,

> unembittered by that misanthropy which springs from revulsion of feeling. . . . The moral of it is, that if we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for their sakes rather than for our own; we must look at their truth to themselves, full as much as their truth to us.[9]

Here we have a person who is shy, but secretly ambitious, a stranger to children, emotionally torn, and insecure of her attainments. Except for her stern sense of duty, it is difficult to think of a more unsuitable candidate for the teaching role; why then did she choose that career? It is not easy to see, either, why some of her most fervent hopes should have centered on keeping a school. In trying to account for that choice and those hopes, my emphasis will be on Charlotte Bronte's inward life and her external constraints. Thus my essay will have echoes of Lortie's Schoolteacher,[10] with its concerns for the structural factors shaping teaching and for its phenomenological realities.

However, the basis for my analysis will not be interviews and survey data, but two literary masterpieces: Charlotte Bronte's Villette[11] and Mrs. Gaskell's biography of its author, The Life of Charlotte Bronte.[12] As a practiced novelist of skill and compassion, Mrs. Gaskell found a great and fascinating subject in her friend's life. This biography, a classic of its kind, allows consideration of Charlotte Bronte's life, in which teaching figured prominently, but hardly as a personal good embraced freely.

Villette is Charlotte Bronte's last and most mature work and its heroine Lucy Snowe is a barely veiled portrait of the author. In response to her publisher's criticism, she conceded that Lucy "may be thought morbid and weak. . . . I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid."[13] I will occasionally refer to Bronte's first novel, The Professor;[14] very close to the lived experience and published only

posthumously, this work rehearses some of the themes in Villette. The Life of Charlotte Bronte frames my account of Villette; it contains a great many of Charlotte's letters and the personal testimony of people who knew her. I will also draw on Margaret Lane's The Bronte Story,[15] a summary of 100 years of Bronte scholarship that qualifies and amplifies some of Mrs. Gaskell's perceptions.

What is the motive for turning to literature in examining conditions of teaching and the inward life of teachers? Literature widens the scope of experience and reflection; unlike personal experience, it is equally available to all readers and sufficiently removed from each individual's life so as not to bring forward bias. Because of their subject matter and social function, literary texts identify and explore human problems less accessible to other studies of teaching. They do not involve the intellect alone, but appropriately speak to the imagination and the emotions. Novels and biographies deal with the difficulty and indeterminacy of human experience, featuring many-sided characters and illuminating the vulnerability of people and plans, the force of circumstances, and the conflict of commitments. Discussing a whole novel and a life makes it possible to examine a whole story of aspirations and retreat from hope, of constraints and transcendence, placing its development in a person, and way of life.[16]

The aim of my account is to provide reflection about, and a considered response to, conditions of teaching through the presentation of a woman's story, fictional and lived, with complex and concrete content, crafted with literary genius, and capable of bringing universal and time-bound questions to the active and continued attention of the reader. It is a reflective consideration of literature rather than literary criticism and extends a recent trend among philosophers to turn to literature in examining basic questions and stimulating

reflection.[17] Accordingly, my presentation raises philosophical issues of general human interest: questions concerning choice and chance, freedom and love, self-realization and the pursuit of goodness. Given the inexhaustible nature of my texts, this account will of necessity be incomplete, nor do the issues it highlights admit of closure. Hence, the essay is an invitation to read these works.

My prelude follows Charlotte Bronte almost to the boat that takes her away from home and to her foreign destination: a girl's school in Belgium which is the place of action in Villette. Here Lucy Snowe, a waif, starts out as nursery governess and progresses to becoming a teacher, dreaming of a school of her own. "To progress" means to make a journey, to travel; it signifies also the action of marching or stepping onward or forward. The evaluative idea of advancement is associated with this term: To progress means to make one's way, to get on to better and better conditions. The continuity of advance may well be interrupted by rests or setbacks, and a pilgrim's mood may revert to quiescence or despair. I will recount Lucy's progress mainly in terms of her interior experience, which is in keeping with the intimate subject matter of the novel. That experience, of course, involves other people, and I will detail her conflicted relations to a doctor and a professor.

The epilogue returns to the real Charlotte. It picks up the thread of the author's life from the time she left Belgium. Gathering up the events of her middle years, we will contrast her life as a woman in reality and fiction with the ideal of life that Timbermill represents, and trace the twists of fate that yielded us Villette--and gave her the freedom and love she could have. And we will try to determine just why it is that Mrs. Gaskell calls Charlotte Bronte a woman of extraordinary genius and noble virtue.

Prelude

> Books were indeed a very common sight in that kitchen, the girls were taught by their father theoretically, and by their aunt practically, that to take an active part in all household work was, in their position, woman's simple duty; but, in their careful employment of time, they found many an odd five minutes for reading while watching the cakes, and managed the union of two employments better than King Alfred.[18]

The grey stone house in which we can find that kitchen (part of a museum, today) is a parsonage in Yorkshire. Its aspect is plain and sombre, with stone walls and a surrounding graveyard that is "terribly full of upright tombstones."[19] Stone dykes are everywhere in the wider surroundings of hills and the wild, wind-swept moors. There used to be six children in the house, only one of them a boy; their mother died when the youngest was an infant. Charlotte was the third of six born in almost as many years. Their father, not fond of children, was the Reverend Patrick Bronte. He kept himself to himself in his study; still he was a towering presence in the house and in the hearts and minds of the children.

As his name suggests, Patrick Bronte came from Ireland where he was born, in 1777, into a family that made its living, as Mrs. Gaskell delicately puts it, "by agricultural pursuits."[20] She characterizes this man as powerful, earnest and persevering, purposeful and resolute, with great strength of mind and independence. Charlotte's father opened a public school at the remarkable age of sixteen, cutting all ties to his family to maintain himself by "the labour of his brain." Neither did he fear ridicule: it was then not common for a man of twenty-five, and of his social position, to enter St. John's College, Cambridge, where he received his B.A. degree and was ordained within four years.

If the father remained aloof in his study, the children retreated to theirs, a small room without a fireplace that the servants called the "children's study" by the time the eldest was about seven. For years, the

children would be together in this room, developing a secret life of the imagination that was to leave its mark on all of them. Here they would read whatever they could find, discuss the politics of the day, write plays and draw. Charlotte, at barely thirteen, made up a list of painters whose work she wished to see: "Guido Reni, Julio Romano, Titian, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Coreggio, Annibal Carracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Bartolomeo, Carlo Cignani, Vandyke, Rubens, Bartolomeo Ramerghi," and Mrs. Gaskell exclaims:

> Here is this little girl, in a remote Yorkshire parsonage, who has probably never seen anything worthy the name of a painting in her life, studying the names and characteristics of the great old Italian and Flemish masters, whose work she longs to see some time, in the dim future that lies before her![21]

All in all to each other, the children had none of the company natural to their age and station in life. Except for walking on the moors, their amusements were intellectual and sedentary. As Charlotte admitted sadly, they were rather like "growing potatoes in a cellar."[22] The girls said their lessons to their father who encouraged them to read. The kindly but somewhat narrow-minded aunt who came to the Parsonage after Mrs. Bronte's death did not teach them much besides sewing and the household arts, in which they were expected to become proficient. Once Charlotte became the eldest living sibling, she had to take her share of work in a household that did not boast many servants; Mrs. Gaskell tells us that, at thirteen, Charlotte had "to brush rooms, to run errands, to help in the simpler forms of cooking, to be by turn play-fellow and monitress to her younger [siblings], to make and to mend, and to study economy under her careful aunt."[23]

The sex of the children soon made for distinctions in their education and expectations. While the three oldest girls (from about eight to ten years of age), were sent off to a charitable institution that, converted from a factory, was supposed to serve the needs of the daughters of the poor clergy, their

brother stayed at home where his father worked him hard each day in his study, passing on his education in the classics to his only son. According to the school entrance rules, the girls meanwhile were learning "history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kinds of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work--such as getting up fine linen, ironing, etc."[24] With such an education, they were prepared to become good housewives and mothers, perhaps governesses. This sounds humdrum enough, but being at Cowan Bridge school turned out to be the horrendous experience of institutional life familiar to most of us, because of Charlotte's account of it in Jane Eyre.

It was not only that the girls were deprived in their intellectual lives at that school, they were severely regimented, half-starved and freezing most of the time, and lived under cramped, unhygienic conditions. The originator of its educational scheme moreover felt that he ought to induce a low and humble frame of mind in his charges; he reminded them constantly of "their dependent position, and the fact that they were receiving their education from the charity of others."[25] Maria, Elizabeth, and Charlotte could not do well here, for: "Wild, strong hearts, and powerful minds, were hidden under an enforced propriety and regularity of demeanour and expression."[26] Ailing already, Maria, the eldest, was persecuted by one of the teachers because of her untidiness. There was a "low fever" epidemic at school, and Maria's state worsened so that her father was sent for. She died of consumption at home and Elizabeth, the next sister, also consumptive, left school to die as well.

Charlotte returned home, but only to be sent back to Cowan's Bridge accompanied by her sister Emily. Why did Charlotte not remonstrate against her father's decision? Mrs. Gaskell believes that her

> earnest vigorous mind saw, at an unusually early age, the immense importance of education, as furnishing her with tools which she had the

> strength and the will to wield, and she would be aware that the Cowan's Bridge education was, in many points, the best that her father could provide for her.[27]

Due to their poor health, the girls did not stay another winter and Charlotte, now nine years old, took up her duties at home. Her frame of mind had changed from brightness to a fundamental hopelessness. Yet she was by no means a dim personage. Charlotte, shy, slight, with ill-assembled features, impressed herself on people's memories and arrested their attention. Mrs. Gaskell records her own impression of her "quiet listening intelligence"; however, "now and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs."[28]

Some years passed before Charlotte was sent to another school, and in the interval the children produced vast amounts of imaginative writing--plays, poems, romances--which they bound and catalogued on the kitchen table. Byronic lovers and dread genii populated their bizarre and violent kingdom. In "making out," or imagining things, dreams shaded into the supernatural and thoughts into near obsessions. Mrs. Gaskell only touches on the disturbing contents of those manuscripts in their microscopic handwriting. More recent transcriptions and scholarship show that these juvenile productions document the comparative talents of Charlotte and her brother Branwell. Rev. Bronte's son was, by the family's decree, the child for whose career of undoubted brilliance no sacrifice must be spared; yet his writing "achieves a dullness which makes it almost unreadable"; it is Charlotte's writing that, "for all its Gothic extravagance, is never safe to dismiss as merely tedious; in nearly every page there is a phrase, an idea, a line of description which catches the attention," and, "though it has its sterile tracts, [it] lights up from time to time with color

and mockery; . . . [with] a theatrical brilliance that at least beguiles the eye."[29]

When Charlotte entered Roe Head school, she kept the other girls awake at night with lurid tales. Her fellow pupils were puzzled by her ignorance of grammar and geography, her eager, refined perceptions of natural beauty, her wide knowledge of poetry, and her indifference to their amusements: "She said she had never played and would not play."[30] Charlotte now spent all her time studying, "constantly reading and learning; with a strong conviction of the necessity and value of education, very unusual in a girl of fifteen."[31] With its seven to ten pupils, this school was like a private home and its gifted teacher Miss Wooler was motherly, loved and respected by all pupils:

> She had a remarkable knack of making them feel interested in whatever they had to learn. They set to their studies, not as to tasks and duties to be got through, but with a healthy desire and thirst for knowledge, of which she had managed to make them perceive the relishing flavor. They did not leave off reading and learning as soon as the compulsory presence of school was taken away. They had been taught to think, to analyse, to reject, to appreciate. Charlotte was happy in the choice made for her of the second school to which she was sent.[32]

Having completed her education at Roe Head, Charlotte was in a position to teach her sisters and, with them, taught steadily at Sunday school besides. She was very glad to be back home. She returned to Roe Head, however, to take her first teaching situation. It was the family's plan to promote Branwell's talents and ambitions by sending him as a pupil to the Royal Academy in London. Charlotte had ruined her eyes in vain attempts to learn how to draw by copying etchings and the sisters would discuss any print they chanced upon for hours--its composition, meaning, associations--yet they idolized their brother's wishes in the belief that he might become a great painter. Thus Charlotte announced to a friend:

> I am going to be a governess. The last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step some time, . . . ; and

> knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy, and Emily at Roe Head. . . . I am sad--very sad--at the thoughts of leaving home; but duty--necessity--these are stern mistresses, who will not be disobeyed. Did I not once say you ought to be thankful for your independence? . . . I repeat it now with double earnestness. . . . and, truth, since I must enter a situation, "My lines have fallen in pleasant places."[33]

Her ambivalence about becoming a teacher at that school is impressive evidence of Charlotte's attachment to home and the scant appeal that teaching had for her then, and was to have always.

Life at the Parsonage was sufficiently monotonous ("An account of one day is an account of all"[34]), but Charlotte soon found the daily grind of teaching wearisome and depressing. She communicated her feelings to one of her earlier fellow pupils: "My life since I saw you has passed as monotonously and unbroken as ever; nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning till night."[35] She complained of a "gloomy uncertainty" and felt she would rather have done with her youth, "to be settling on the verge of the grave."[36] Teaching depressed her health, as well as her spirits; all that Charlotte could do was to endure the work, until she would give way under the strain and had to return to the Parsonage.

At home, the want of variety did not go together with a lack of interest in daily events and activities. Monotony was therefore not tiresome but comforting, even delightful. And, having satisfied the requirements of "woman's simple duties," Charlotte was free to write, read, draw or follow her own thoughts over her needlework, as she pleased. She had abundant leisure precisely because of the family's isolation, due to which life at the Parsonage was nearly destitute of the innumerable small tasks, talks, and pleasures that fill up most people's days. "This made it possible for her," explains Mrs. Gaskell, "to go through long and deep histories of feeling and imagination"; while, as a teacher, "all exercise of her strongest and most characteristic

faculties was now out of the question."[37] The numbing "bustle and confusion"[38] of school life pressed on her ceaselessly, making her feel wretched and hopeless.

And, at home, there were Emily and gentle Anne, the youngest sister, her dear companions in making bread and beds and in the long talks they had, once their aunt had retired to bed; then the sisters,

> put away their work, and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and down,--as often with the candles extinguished, for economy's sake, as not,--their figures glancing into the fire-light, and out into the shadow, perpetually. At this time, they talked about past cares, and troubles; they planned for their future, and consulted each other as to their plans.[39]

These plans began to have a flavor of ambition as the girls grew into women and the hopes for their brother came to nought. They tested their promise as poets through daring letters sent to great literary figures (letters that met with discouraging responses), later they would discuss the plots of their novels. Eventually, they would have to reckon with the fact that Anne, though willing, was too delicate to sustain herself in employment as a governess and that Emily simply could not live away from home.

Emily had accompanied Charlotte to be a pupil at Roe Head when her elder sister started working there. But she turned sick with longing for the freedom and solitude of the moors and Charlotte believed Emily would die, were she to stay at Roe Head. Nevertheless, they decided after her return that Emily, too, must go out teaching: "They felt that it was a duty to relieve their father of the burden of their support, if not entirely, or that of all three, at least that of one or two; and, naturally, the lot devolved upon the elder ones to find some remunerative occupation."[40] Yet with forty pupils, Charlotte pronounced Emily's teaching position at Halifax "slavery," it was, "hard labor from six in the morning to eleven at night. . . . I fear she can never stand it."[41] What could they do? What could Charlotte do? Emily had to come home

again, Anne was still a pupil at Roe Head, where Charlotte's salary merely sufficed to keep them both clothed, while her education failed to entitle her to a larger one.

The sisters had to depend upon themselves, most heavily relying upon Charlotte. The Rev. Bronte was liberal and charitable with his small income; the aunt's annuity would come to others after her death. Matrimony, without an all-consuming attachment, did not enter Charlotte's scheme of life; thus she declined an offer of marriage from a man she rather liked but could not adore. Nor did she accept the offer of a young Irish clergyman ("witty, lively, ardent, clever too"[42]) who was so taken by her wit and conversation during an evening at the Parsonage that he proposed the next day. Branwell did not take advantage of the opportunity the sisters were sacrificing themselves for; his prospects in life were still unsettled, and looked less and less promising. There was no way open to Charlotte except to return to teaching, which did not solve their problems and for which neither she nor her sisters were suited. As Mrs. Gaskell observes:

> Neither she nor her sisters were naturally fond of children. The hieroglyphics of childhood were an unknown language to them. . . . they had not the happy knack of imparting information, which seems to be a separate gift from the faculty of acquiring it; a kind of sympathetic tact, which instinctively perceives the difficulties that impede comprehension in a child's mind, and that yet are too vague and unformed for it, with its half-developed powers of expression, to explain by words. Consequently, teaching very young children was anything but a "delightful task" to the three Bronte sisters. . . . they might have done better with older girls. . . . But the education which the village clergyman's daughters had received, did not as yet qualify them to undertake the charge of advanced pupils.[43]

The sisters continued their fruitless gyrations: attempts to brave the outside world obeying necessity, followed by a retreat to their fixed and still center, the Parsonage. Emily tried teaching one more time only to give it up for good. At home, the author of Wuthering Heights now, "took the principal part of the cooking upon herself, and did all the household ironing"; and after

their old servant became infirm, "it was Emily who made all the bread for the family; and anyone passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her studying German out of an open book, propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough; but no study, however interesting, was allowed to interfere with the goodness of the bread."[44] Anne developed those pains in her side and difficulties in breathing which recalled the last illness of both Mary and Elizabeth. She also had to come home, not even finishing her education at Roe Head. But Anne took a position as a private governess after a while, and her silent endurance was insupportable to Charlotte.

Charlotte herself went back to Miss Wooler's school to be, as she wrote despairingly, "engaged in the old business,--teach, teach, teach . . . "[45] She felt this return a terrible strain for it confined her to uncongenial work and deprived her at once of the company of those she loved, of any chance for improving her--and their--lot, and of the freedom and privacy she craved. And when she later worked as a private governess she suffered even more. In a letter to Emily she made her feelings quite plain: "I could like to be at home. I could like to work in a mill. I could like to feel some mental liberty. I could like this weight of restraint to be taken off."[46] Some time at home relaxed the strain and Charlotte again resolved to look for the work available to her; "I intend to force myself to take another situation when I can get one, though I <u>hate</u> and <u>abhor</u> the very thoughts. . . . But I must do it; and, therefore, I heartily wish I would hear of a family where they need such a commodity as a governess."[47] All the sisters showed great fortitude in putting themselves repeatedly through these experiences. In contemplating their impotence, moral strength and power of endurance, one is moved to pity and awe.

It was in this context that the great scheme of starting a school was mooted; the Bronte sisters thought that with some minor changes and additions

to the house, a few pupils could be lodged and taught at the Parsonage. Charlotte, still engaged in the "dreary solitary work"[48] of a private governess, with its uncertain, perpetual employment and earnings of 16 pounds per annum, confided this dream to a friend:

> I have often, you know, said how much I wished such a thing; but I never could conceive where the capital was to come from. . . . Emily, and Anne, and I, keep it in view. It is our polar star,[49] and we look to it in all circumstances of despondency.

Given their experience of children as "the troublesome necessities of humanity,"[50] it seems strange that this project should be heralded as such a high and fervent hope. But let us see what starting a school at home would accomplish for the Bronte sisters.

Their independence was vital to Emily and Charlotte, but Anne, too, flourished in the seclusion of the Parsonage. Their quest for freedom was intertwined with the requirements of necessity, since they all felt it an unquestionable duty to relieve their father of their support. Seeing the downward career of their brother, on whom they might have been able to rely, only strengthened this stern sense of duty and necessity. Their adventurous letters to literary figures showed that they were not without ambitions: They wanted to make something out of their unoccupied talents, and Charlotte especially desired to get on in life and better herself. Starting a school would go some way towards all of these goals.

But what was crucial about the school project was that it would allow the sisters to be with one another, in their "real characters"; then, Charlotte felt, even teaching would be "smooth and easy."[51] Mrs. Gaskell gives voice to their love for one another, which was at the heart of this plan:

> Emily and Anne were bound up in their lives and interest like twins. The former from reserve, the latter from timidity, avoided all friendships and intimacies beyond their sisters. Emily was impervious to influence; she never came in contact with public opinion. . . . Her love was poured out on Anne, as Charlotte's was on her. But the

> affection among all the three was stronger than either death or life.[52]

Seeing her older sisters die at Cowan Bridge had made Charlotte's affections for her younger sisters fiercely protective. "To have a school," Mrs. Gaskell concludes, meant for Charlotte to

> have some portion of daily leisure, uncontrolled but by her own sense of duty; it was for the three sisters, loving each other with so passionate an affection, to be together under one roof, and yet earning their own subsistence; above all, it was to have the power of watching over those two whose life and happiness were ever to Charlotte far more than her own.[53]

Still this was not all. When Charlotte inquired into their chances of success, it became evident that, to attract pupils, they needed superior educational advantages.

Charlotte had only hazy notions about these advantages. In her response to this intimation of higher things, however, more was bound up than necessity, duty, and even love; "a fire," she confided to an intimate friend, "was kindled in my very heart, which I could not quench. I so longed to increase my attainments--to become something better than I am."[54] When another friend described the pictures and cathedrals she had seen in Brussels, Charlotte's soul expanded with yearning:

> I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read her letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings--wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute, I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised.[55]

This confluence of motives sent Charlotte to Brussels, the Villette of the novel, once her eager, persuasive letter to their aunt had secured the necessary means. In this letter, the longing for knowledge and the glimpse of her unstirred powers account for its glowing, exalted tone; the justification of the request for aid is understandably utilitarian--though daring enough to invoke the father's example in defense of his daughters' ambitions. Charlotte

explained to her aunt all the advantages of Brussels, where she expected to live cheaply and get access to superior educational facilities while acquiring French, German, and Italian, as well as polished and improving social connections:

> These are advantages which would turn to real account, when we actually commenced a school; and if Emily could share them with me, we can take a footing in the world afterwards which we never can do now. . . . I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed to us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but whoever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us <u>all</u> to get on. I know we have talents and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us.[56]

The aunt could not refuse, and Charlotte was launched on this great adventure, promising herself to do "my best to make the utmost of every advantage that shall come within my reach."[57] Emily had to come along to give their school project a real chance of succeeding. On their return from Brussels, there would be an end to their gyrations: the sisters would come to the Parsonage to stay, and stay together. As Charlotte is transformed into the orphaned Lucy Snowe, whose progress we will follow, Emily is left behind, together with the rest of the Bronte family. But we will recognize the passionate tones of Charlotte's voice in a passage from <u>Villette</u>, detailing "Lucy's progress":

> My vague aim, as I went, was to find the stone basin, with its clear depth and green lining: of that coolness and verdure I thought, with the passionate thirst of unconscious fever. Amidst the glare and hurry, and throng and noise, I still chiefly longed to come on that circular mirror of crystal, and surprise the moon glassing therein her pearly front.[58]

<u>Lucy's Progress</u>

In Lucy Snowe's past, there were people she cared for: her godmother with her adored son, a small fanciful girl of strong feelings, and a crippled woman who Lucy served as a companion for after her parents' death, which forced her to rely upon herself. As everything within her became narrowed to her lot--the

dimness and isolation of the sickroom with its sad routines--the afflicted woman died. Lucy bitterly reflects, "I had wanted to compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains."[59]

Lucy Goes Abroad

So there is Lucy, at twenty-three years, without home or friends, uncared for and without guidance, unclaimed by anyone and with nothing to hope for. She makes up her mind to wander, boldly making for London where her spirit "shook its always-fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. . . . Who but a coward would . . . forever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity."[60] But reaction sets in quickly, and her position rises on Lucy "like a ghost":

> Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? . . . but I did not regret the step taken, nor wish to retract it. A strong, vague persuasion that it was better to go forward than backward, and that I could go forward--that a way, however narrow and difficult, would in time open--predominated over other feelings.[61]

This persuasion impels her onward, to the Continent, and chance brings her to Villette, and to Madame Beck's school for girls.

On board the ship, Lucy's revived ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment gives way to other feelings when "the cold air and black scowl of the night seemed to rebuke me for my presumption in being where I was: The lights of the foreign seaport town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes."[62] Lucy goes out into the night alone and travels on to Villette, "with no prospect but the dubious cloud tracery of hope."[63] She will try to find her way to Madame Beck's establishment where, as a young lady has mentioned to Lucy during the passage, an English governess is wanted.

Arriving in Villette in fog and rain, Lucy's luggage seems lost, with all of her remaining money, and she cannot make herself understood. Lucy is rescued by a handsome young Englishman who excites her enthusiasm. Considerately, he leads her part of the way to an inn where she can spend the night:

> He moved on, and I followed him, through the darkness and the small soaking rain. The Boulevard was all deserted, its path miry, the water dripping from its trees; the park was black as midnight. In the double gloom of trees and fog, I could not see my guide; I could only follow his tread. Not the least fear had I. I believe I would have followed that frank tread, through continual night, to the world's end.[64]

Her guide leaves her to find the rest of her way. But Lucy takes fright, becomes confused, loses her way--and suddenly stands before the door of Madame Beck's school. She decides to ring the doorbell and is soon waiting "in a cold, glittering salon, with porcelain stove unlit, and gilded ornaments, and polished floor."[65]

Madame Beck inspects her coolly and gravely, taking Lucy's appearance on her doorstep as evidence of the astonishing intrepidity of Englishwomen. She does want a nursery-governess for her children and seems satisfied with the integrity of Lucy's account of herself, who tells her that she has left her country to gain knowledge, and her bread. There is some intrepidity, as well, in Madame Beck's decision to hire Lucy, who cannot provide references.

That same evening, our waif is eating supper at Madame Beck's:

> Surely pride was not already beginning its whispers in my heart; yet I felt a sense of relief when, instead of being left in the kitchen, as I half anticipated, I was led forward to a small inner room.[66]

Later that night, she awakens to find her employer examining her belongings and Lucy herself, who feigns sleep. Madame Beck disappears with the keys to Lucy's trunk, desk, and workbox (presumably, to take imprints of them): "All this was very un-English: truly, I was in a foreign land."[67]

Looking after her charges, hearing their English lessons and prayers, repairing Madame's silk dresses and sewing children's clothes, Lucy has ample opportunity to observe her employer and the whole well-run establishment. There are about 100 day pupils, a score of boarders, four teachers, eight masters, six servants; and the administrative machinery runs smoothly, and pleasantly. Behind it all is Madame Beck, a supremely capable woman never showing "bustle, fatigue, fever, or any undue excitement";[68] nobody, Lucy avers, "could have browbeaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, or overreached her astuteness."[69] Her eyes, peaceful and watchful, express her spirit of surveillance, which epitomizes Madame Beck's upright though secretive and coldly calculating foreign nature.

The spacious, old house has an ancient walled garden that draws Lucy into the retreat of its shadows when it is not full of running, shouting girls:

> The turf was verdant, the gravelled walks were white; sun-bright nasturtiums clustered beautiful about the roots of the doddered orchard giants. There was a large berceau, above which spread the shade of an acacia; there was a smaller, more sequestered bower, nestled in the vines which ran all along a high and grey wall, and gathered their tendrils in a knot of beauty, and hung their clusters in loving profusion about the favoured spot where jasmine and ivy met and married them.[70]

The pupils have a great deal of freedom and pleasure, and Lucy notices their robust air of physical well-being. Their education is not austere and burdensome. What they learn, the pupils learn easily, without oppression or pain. It was the teachers and masters who were "more stringently tasked, as all the real head-labour was to be done by them, in order to save the pupils."[71]

Lucy meanwhile is learning French, practicing it in the daytime and studying it at night. Otherwise, she feels resigned to her position--not with any true contentment, to be sure, as the work is neither to her taste nor of interest to her. Yet she has her daily bread and shelter, and seeks her joys in a secret life of the imagination, which lures her "along the track of reverie,

down into some deep lull of dreamland."[72] Madame Beck, watching Lucy's work with approval, now disturbs her precarious peace of mind with the offer to have her take over the class of the absent English master. Lucy is at first dismayed: her mastery of French, the medium of instruction, is far from perfect. Moreover, she dreads this sudden encounter with a large group of boisterous girls, which would be a trial to anyone, but particularly to someone of her dispositions. Perhaps most of all, she is afraid to hope for more than an absence of positive suffering; there is safety in the obscurity and half-death of her life. Madame Beck's taunts, however, make her rise to the challenge: "Will you," she says, "Go backward or forward?"[73]

Lucy responds warmly, "en avant," and proceeds to her first lesson, amidst the murmurs and growing unruliness of the girls not inclined to be taught by a "bonne d'enfants." Madame Beck has warned her that she will be on her own: expecting aid is tantamount to an admission of incompetence. Her pupils, almost young women, expect an easy victory. Lucy considers, "I knew I looked a poor creature, and in many respects actually was so, yet nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion."[74] Since she cannot upbraid the class in French, she singles out one of the leaders, snatches her exercise book and, mounting the podium, begins to read her English composition out loud and scornfully, slowly tearing it to pieces afterwards. She dispatches, with quick resolve, another mutineer into a closet, and then goes on to English dictation, in a composed and courteous manner. The girls are not at all displeased and Madame Beck, who has secretly been watching Lucy's performance, judges that she will do; thus Lucy becomes an English teacher.

Lucy Becomes a Teacher

Under the stimulus of new employment, the ambitions that she had tried to keep dormant, the hopes that experience and timidity had numbed, awaken in Lucy:

> My time was now well and profitably filled up. What with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. Experience of a certain kind lay before me, on no narrow scale.[75]

Villette (in reality, Brussels) is a large cosmopolitan city; Lucy's pupils are of different nationalities and all ranks in life. She means to succeed and will not be thwarted in her first attempt to get on in life by the girls she thinks ignorant, lazy, and often stupid and unprincipled as well. She puts her mind to subduing this foreign tribe, finding that patience interspersed with raillery and sarcasm, works--especially as she increases her command of French to encompass its more vigorous and forcible idioms. Some pupils grow attached to her, and Lucy walks occasionally with them in the garden.

And Lucy recognizes as one of her pupils the young lady who had told her about Madame Beck's school during the passage from England. Ginevra Fanshawe is exceedingly pretty and charming, but shallow, selfish and indolent, exercising her faculties only when she wishes to shine, and that mostly before men. With some sense, she prefers men like her rather than those with sterling qualities and virtues. But of course, men of better worth are not impervious to her charms, nor does she refrain from displaying them for their benefit.

A man thus caught is Dr. John, the young English physician in attendance on Madame Beck's establishment. No woman can fail to pay homage to this man of tall stature, with a cleft, Grecian chin, fine profile and subtly disquieting smile. "There was something in it that pleased, but something too that brought surging up into one's mind all one's foibles and weak points: All that could

lay one open to laugh."[76] Yet in his laugh, there is an inexpressible geniality. Lucy recognizes his face, dimly, but as she listens to his tread her recognition becomes clear; Dr. John is the helpful stranger, who guided her arrival in Belgium: "It was the same firm and equal stride I had followed under the dripping trees."[77] With his fair looks and sunny temper, he becomes to Lucy a "golden image."[78]

Under cover of her own "gown of shadow" [79]--a grey-purple dress, signifying more than a garment--Lucy rivets her attention on this man, suffering a further recognition which evokes the past. Dr. John is her godmother's son; and meeting him now, enamored of Ginevra, disturbs the precarious repose of her nature again:

> Oh, my childhood! I had feelings--passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future--such a future as mine--to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature.[80]

A storm that mirrors the tempest deep within her--"too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts"[81]--rouses her to life: "I did long, achingly, . . . for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upward and onward. This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head."[82]

Lucy becomes Dr. John's counselor in his love troubles with a perverse pleasure in remaining unrecognized: "I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination."[83] Outwardly calm, she accepts Dr. John's treatment of her as a person of cold sense and no feeling: hardly a woman at all. If his blue eyes have beamed admiration at most any pupil or teacher, including Madame Beck, they look right past Lucy, who tries to put away all thoughts of love and marriage, stigmatizing herself as "Light-heart the Beggar."[84] She is amazed

that Ginevra should be drawn to an insignificant, simpering youth of minor nobility, when Dr. John has set his heart upon her: "He, with his advantages, he love in vain!"[85]

As Lucy withdraws to her bower in the garden to ponder the strangeness of things, another man comes into her life. She had met Monsieur Paul on her first coming to Madame Beck's and, since then, has learned that he is also teaching at the school, working hard in his fierce way at getting his pupils to appreciate literature; and the girls do certainly appreciate M. Paul, their professor. In summer, there is always a school fete, at which there is a play directed by him. M. Paul wants Lucy to take over the part of a pupil who has suddenly fallen ill, overriding all her scruples in his masterful, irritable way that hides a deep appeal: he cannot bear the thought of having the whole attempt fail. Lucy does not feel the same zealousness: "On me school triumphs shed but a cold lustre. I had wondered--and wondered now--how it was that for him they seemed to shine with a hearth warmth and hearth glow. He cared for them perhaps too much; I probably too little."[86]

Again, Lucy rises to the occasion, which brings her not only closer to a man who will mean much to her, but gives her more insight into herself. In the actual performance, her tongue loosens, she finds her own voice and thinks of nothing but the person she is representing--and of M. Paul, watching and prompting from the sidelines. She becomes composed and feels the necessary power rising within her; "Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: Ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself."[87] Lucy finds an unexpected spring of delight within herself and relishes this new-found faculty of dramatic expression, for the hour. She is stirred also because she is playing, opposite Ginevra, with Dr. John looking

on. This makes her bare her very soul, "I acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer."[88]

M. Paul recognizes Lucy's passionate desire for triumph. He promises to be her friend and to help her in the public examinations that, after a spell of drill and study, follow on the summer fete. The professor usually examines in all subjects, with the exception of English, which he does not master. At first inclined to drop these examinations rather than let Lucy conduct them, he changes his mind: "After all, you are solitary and a stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known."[89] True to his promise, M. Paul makes Lucy's part in this public occasion easy, and it passes over well.

The school year is at an end and school is breaking up for two months, the long vacation. Lucy is bound for her darkest trial yet. Now that all others have left and the necessity for daily exertion is removed, nervous exhaustion rather than relaxation sets in. For anyone observing Lucy, this reaction would have been predictable, but there is no one there, no one to care. Lucy's courage, resolve, and reason falter. Her work proves a mere "prop," an outward support that keeps her from falling, incapable of sustaining her inwardly. Teaching to her is no important vocation that diverts her thoughts and divides her interests. Hence looking forward, "was not to hope, . . . spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good."[90] She is oppressed by the conviction that she is born to suffer, unloved and unowned.

Lucy takes to wandering, solitary, through the hot September days, beyond the city gates, out into the country, farther and farther on:

> A goad thrust me on, a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine. I often walked all day, through the burning noon and the arid afternoon, and the dusk evening, and came home with moonrise.[91]

Bodily exhaustion fails to ease her; restless, sleepless, wrung with anguish, she falls prey to a nameless despair. At its climax, Lucy feels that her appointed trial "must now be turned by my own hands, hot, feeble, trembling as they were."[92] Perishing for comfort and advice, she seeks out a Catholic priest who listens to her, puzzled but kindly. Lucy is solaced already by communication and thinks of returning to the empty school; she is, however, too weak and confused to find her way and too irresolute to ask for guidance. Meeting with a storm, her spirit does not give way but finds itself: "My heart did not fail at all in this conflict; I only wished that I had wings and could ascend the gale, spread and repose my pinions on its strength, career in its course, sweep where it swept."[93] As all physical strength leaves her, Lucy totters, collapses and knows nothing more.

Lucy Finds Temporary Asylum

In the lull that follows Lucy finds a temporary asylum under the protection of friends. When she awakens she fears she must be delirious, for her intimate knowledge of things around her is uncanny: "I knew--I was obliged to know--the green chintz of that little chair; the little snug chair itself, the carved, shining, foliated frame of that glass; the smooth, milky green of the china vessels on the stand; the very stand too, with its top of grey marble, splintered at one corner."[94] There is also the picture of a boy she knew as Graham, showing a face whose penetrating eyes and gay smile belong to Dr. John. Everything speaks to Lucy of the past, of her godmother Bretton's house; and she recognizes the portly, vigorous woman who enters her bedroom as Mrs. Bretton herself. Venturing downstairs to the living room in the evening, Lucy is transported back to England altogether:

> How pleasant it was in its air of perfect domestic comfort! How warm in its amber lamplight and vermilion fire flush! To render the

> picture perfect, tea stood ready on the table--an English tea, whereof the whole shining service glanced at me familiarly.[95]

Lucy and Mrs. Bretton both wait, as they used to do years ago, for Graham, now Dr. John, to come home. As the mother hears the crash of the gate, she fills the teapot and draws the most comfortable chair close to the hearth.

During tea, due recognition is effected on all sides. And, if Dr. John marvels at his failure to see what was before his eyes, he also marvels at Lucy's keeping back in her teacher's place, without claiming their old acquaintance. Her pride accounts for part of that reserve. Lucy relates what happened to her during the last ten years, only touching on her "single-handed conflict with Life, with Death, with Grief, with Fate."[96] She thinks herself too different from her godmother, whom Lucy compares to a "stately ship cruising safely on smooth seas," with all its crew and plenty of provender, whereas Lucy is like "the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark boat-house, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, when cloud encounters water, when danger and death divide between them the rule of the great deep."[97] Still, she is ready to accept her godmother's patronage; submerging, Lucy finds shelter from the storm:

> My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water: the blanched cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling angles. . . . When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last. . . . I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from a shore of the upper world--a world so high above that the rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers, could sound down in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby.[98]

Care and guardianship are soon augmented by the old affections; but Lucy fears her eager heart, praying, "let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream: let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome

waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know."[99]

Time passes sweetly between rest, dreams, and the pleasant companionship of people whose temper--bland, genial, and active--is a solace to Lucy. She accepts food and drink from the ready hands of her godmother with the grateful pleasure of the child she once was. She learns that Graham found her the night of her collapse in the arms of the priest, who had followed Lucy to see her home safely. She tells Dr. John about her cruel sense of desolation, and he and her godmother conspire to afford her daily mild amusements. As usual, Lucy observes life around her keenly.

Financial difficulties have brought the Brettons to Belgium, with all their belongings. But there is no doubt of Graham's success as a physician. Nor is his nature, as Lucy's, at war with his destiny and labors. Fate, she thinks, has smiled on Graham Bretton whose character has suited him happily for his chosen profession with its obvious importance and the respect it commands. Lucy cannot conceive how the doctor manages his time and spirits, given his commitment to his profession and good works:

> I can hardly tell how he managed his engagements; they were numerous, yet by dint of system, he classed them in an order which left him a daily period of liberty. I often saw him hard-worked, yet seldom overdriven, and never irritated, confused, or oppressed. What he did was accomplished with the ease and grace of all-sufficing strength; with the bountiful cheerfulness of high and unbroken energies.[100]

His visits to the poor are not just those of a physician but of a man who has the happiness and well-being of other people at heart. Hence Dr. John's "poor patients in the hospitals welcomed him with a sort of enthusiasm."[101]

To the public eye, then, this man is perfect: self-effacing, strong, and generous. Yet seeing him at home, Lucy discerns a source of his strength that tarnishes the golden image. To the "indoor view," Dr. John is self-centered, complacent, and not without weakness, for the "fireside picture" shows

"consciousness of what he has and what he is; pleasure in homage, some recklessness in exciting, some vanity in receiving the same."[102] Nor is he a man of fine sympathies, he is rather a man of fine feelings; with strong sensibilities of his own, he does not readily grasp what another person feels--though more than willing to be kind once these feelings are made known to him, as in the case of Lucy. In general, she judges, Dr. John extracts from experience food for his masculine self-love, which is knowing, greedy and all-devouring.

Lucy's just observations on the two sides of Dr. John show that he is human, and a social creature. His "admiration societies" limit his perceptions and make him a prisoner of unrealistic expectations. But, if human nature is to appear of unmixed goodness and all-sufficing strength, neither of which it is truly capable of, than people have to cheat somewhere. The shining light of the public persona depends on murky sources privately supplied. This is the price of fantasy.

Perhaps part of Ginevra's attraction stems from the fact that she will not be subdued to the proper state of homage for the doctor: her expectations are not that high and they lie elsewhere. What helps Dr. John overcome his infatuation is his better side. When the Brettons take Lucy to a concert, Dr. John notices that Ginevra, also in the audience, jokes with her fashionable neighbor about portly Mrs. Bretton. Graham loves his mother and will not have her slighted; thus Ginevra's impertinence helps to set him free.

That evening, Lucy is altogether happy. She is thrilled to see the festively dressed people, the king and his queen, the choir of white-robed girls, and the vast concert hall: "Pendant from the dome flamed a mass that dazzled me--a mass, I thought, of rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or

fragments of rainbows shivered."[103] What she perceives so rapturously is a chandelier. Lucy also sees M. Paul who helps to organize the performance of the choir. If the professor is energetic, earnest and intent, he also, and obviously, loves display and authority. There is something half-vexing, half-endearing in the naivete and superfluous vigor of this little man. He notices Lucy, too, but she avoids his eyes, unwilling to have the radiant present overshadowed by the future: the walled-in garden and classrooms at Madame Beck's.

Lucy has encountered the professor out of school earlier, when visiting a gallery as part of the distractions the doctor ordered. She is happy to be left alone to wander freely, "happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning and forming conclusions."[104] Pleased by small Flemish pictures and sketches of national costumes, she is not taken by the grand canvasses: "Several very well executed and complacent-looking fat women struck me as by no means the goddesses they appeared to consider themselves."[105] Neither does she care for Cleopatra, the queen of the collection:

> She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks. . . . She ought likewise to have worn decent garments . . . : out of abundance of material--seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery--she managed to make inefficient raiment.[106]

Shocked at finding Lucy alone, and before <u>that</u> picture, M. Paul lectures her on the proprieties and makes her look at a didactical, flat series on the life of women, representing: a prim pale girl clutching a prayer book; a veiled, praying bride; followed by a young mother bent over puffy babies; and, finally, the same woman as a disconsolate widow in black. Lucy scorns these "angels": "What women to live with! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities!"[107] As ideas of womanhood, she finds them as bad, in their way, as "Cleopatra."

Not yet content to disagree with Lucy, the professor tells her to be silent and denounces her opinions as rash and ignorant. The acerbity and despotism of this fiery dark man contrast with the sweet temper of Dr. John:

> He betrayed no weakness which harassed all your feelings with considerations as to how its faltering must be propped; from him broke no irritability which startled calm and quenched mirth; his lips let fall no caustic that burned to the bone; his eye shot no morose shafts . . .[108] beside him was rest and refuge--around him, fostering sunshine.

However, Lucy must leave her shelter and return to teaching.

Lucy Gets on in Teaching

When Lucy stands before Madame Beck's house again it is dark and rainy, just as on the night of her first arrival. Seeing the tears in her eyes at parting, Dr. John promises to relieve her solitude by writing to Lucy. She schools herself not to expect too much, restraining hope with the harsh voice of reason. In the morning, her mind makes "for itself some imperious rules, prohibiting under deadly penalties all weak retrospect of happiness past; commanding a patient journeying through the wilderness of the present."[109] Thus readied for work, she lifts her head and her eyes meet M. Paul's gaze. He tells her that she is both "mourning and mutinous": grieving for her friends and rebelling against her yoke and confinement.

As Lucy is "getting once more inured to the harness of school, and lapsing from the passionate pain of change to the palsy of custom,"[110] she receives her first letter from Dr. John, seized upon and delivered by the jealous hands of M. Paul. She takes her treasure to the attic to measure the heights and depths of its delights. And here she meets with the apparition of a nun, her veiled head bandaged and white. Lucy confides that dreadful encounter to Dr. John who, "at once exercised his professional skill, and gratified his natural benevolence, by a course of cordial and attentive treatment."[111] He writes

to her, he visits her, he takes her home and then, as Lucy had feared, her vital source of comfort dries up for seven weeks of "inward winter."

The Brettons have met again the small fanciful girl that lived for a while at their house when Lucy was there, too. Pauline has retained her childlike nature, which has acquired a delicate grace appealing to Dr. John. Lucy soon sees that he is in love. Pauline's distinguished father is impressed with Lucy who bluntly states that she teaches mostly to make money; he values her as a woman forced to act on her own behalf. She has meanwhile pondered leaving Madame Beck's employment: "Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain."[112] No plan seems available until she is offered the position of Pauline's companion, with a generous salary. But Lucy declines:

> I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence.[113]

And there are some glimmerings of hope and change in Lucy's situation. Wishing to reward her for her labors, Madame Beck makes Lucy a present of her liberty, removing all the small constraints she well understands feel like shackles to the English teacher. Lucy goes out more, takes German lessons together with Pauline, and visits at her father's grand house. Watching her closely, M. Paul accuses Lucy of being worldly and flighty, not content with her serious calling. Ironically, she declares herself "a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher."[114] Lucy hears M. Paul, who holds the chair of Belles Lettres at Villette's principal college, deliver an address in honor of a royal prince

with the pointed earnestness characteristic of his teaching. He comes to her openly eager for words of praise, which unfortunately fail her.

Lucy feels a new and pleasant assurance in the stormy relations with the professor, now also her teacher. When he calls her vain and upbraids her for wearing anything but the most sober garments, she says to herself, "You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life's sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray."[115] M. Paul leaves tokens of his presence among her things: volumes of the classics, interesting new works, magazines and romances, all of which Lucy reads with pleasure, appreciating his thoughtfulness. She sees that, whereas Dr. John's sweetness is an unmeaning emanation of a self-seeking nature, the professor's fierce airs hide a heart of deep affinity to the weak, "in its core was a place, tender beyond a man's tenderness; a place that humbled him to little children, that bound him to girls and women . . . rebel as he would."[116]

Perhaps because of this ambivalence, M. Paul persecutes women with a claim to learning and all particular talents seem to disturb him; rather than aid in their development, he subjects them to stringent tests. When it rings true, however, he takes deep pleasure in the promise of his pupils and fosters it. Accordingly, M. Paul is helpful as long as Lucy shows herself deficient, but "when my faculties began to struggle themselves free, and my time of energy and fulfillment came; when I voluntarily doubled, tripled, quadrupled the tasks he set, to please him as I thought, his kindness became sternness."[117] He accuses Lucy of intellectual pride, a desire for unfeminine knowledge, and even of a secret acquaintance with the classics; his injustice stirs Lucy's aspirations: "There were times when I would have given my right hand to possess the treasures he ascribed to me."[118]

Lucy feels rising within her--not the knowledge M. Paul accuses her of--but a knowledge of her own, related to her faculty of imagination. Writing compositions is the "very breath of her nostrils," and, having made sure of her promise, the strength and rarity of her faculties, the professor goes through all of her writing "carefully, noting every error, and demonstrating why they were errors, and how the words and phrases ought to have been written."[119] Half out of pride in her, half from a wish to see her fail, he urges Lucy to participate in this year's public examination as a member of the school's first (i.e., most advanced) form.

There is a similar conflict of feelings in Lucy who has her pride and ambitions; she has never stopped thinking about how to advance in life. Opening a day-school would be the next step in her career. This is no grand project and Lucy does not like the work it entails, but it would give her an object in life and the independence she craves. Yet she knows that she is no scholar; her knowledge has not grown and ripened over time and in its proper seasons. When the professor assigns her themes for composition, she has to work them up laboriously:

> I got books, read up the facts, laboriously constructed a skeleton out of the dry bones of the real, and then clothed them, and tried to breathe into them life, and in this last aim I had pleasure. With me it was a difficult and anxious time till my facts were found, selected and properly jointed; nor could I rest from research and effort till I was satisfied of correct anatomy; the strength of my inward repugnance to the idea of flaw or falsity sometimes enabled me to shun egregrious blunders; but the knowledge was not there in my head, ready and mellow; it had not been sown in Spring, grown in Summer, harvested in Autumn, and garnered through Winter; whatever I wanted I must go out and gather fresh; glean of wild herbs my lap full, and shred them green into the pot.[120]

In many ways, M. Paul's mind is her favorite library. Telling stories to the pupils, he pours out a mental wealth of unconscious prodigality that is bliss to Lucy.[121]

It is no surprise, then, that her public examination starts out a memorable failure. Stung by the disdain of her examiners and despising them heartily, Lucy is mortified at having to show herself an ignoramus in the systematic branches of knowledge. She does better on topics of general information, but her hour comes when she has to write on the topic of human justice. Once Lucy is seized by a vivid idea, her words come pouring, and she triumphs. And after the ordeal, M. Paul offers himself as a friend in earnest. His manner becomes "home-like and mild," they spend hours in conversation, and Lucy tells him about her plan to start a school. Happiness is finding a place in her life, growing daily more real.

If Lucy thinks this friendship fraternal, M. Paul's devoutly Catholic relations see it in a different and truer light. They devise a plan to send him to the West Indies on family business, scheming to keep Lucy and her professor apart during the time before his departure. Near to desperation, Lucy waits for her friend to take his leave of her. The hours pass: "All the long, hot summer day burned away like a Yule log; the crimson of its close perished; I was left bent among the cool blue shades, over the pale and ashen gleams of its night."[122] A servant gives her a sedative, but the opiate rouses her mind to feverish activity: "The classes seem to my thought, great dreary jails . . . filled with spectral and intolerable Memories, laid miserable amongst their straw and their manacles."[123] Lucy leaves the school and wanders through Villette, experiencing its life and lights with an intensity magnified by opium and pain, apprehending the cast of characters in her emotional life in an apotheosis of the imagination that is a release of self, setting it on the way to its own truth.[124]

Lucy admits to herself that she loves and that her proud freedom is an illusion. M. Paul manages to fend off his relatives and comes to her. To say

their good-byes, the two go for a long walk, stopping before a pleasant small house in the suburbs of Villette. M. Paul has the keys; they enter the parlour:

> Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its centre; its small round table shone like the mirror over its hearth . . . ; there was a French clock, a lamp; there were ornaments in biscuit china; the recess of the single ample window was filled with a green stand, bearing three green flower-pots, each filled with a fine plant glowing in bloom. . . . The lattice of this room was open; the outer air breathing through, gave freshness, the sweet violets lent fragrance.[125]

There is another good-sized room, rather more bare, stocked with benches and desks, a teacher's chair and table, a blackboard and rugs, and some sturdy plants on the window sill. M. Paul hands the entranced Lucy a sheaf of advertisements for a day school that bears her name; she is to live and work in the house he prepared for her, waiting for his return. Over a repast as dream-like and idyllic as their retreat, the lovers commune with one another; they part. We do not know that M. Paul will return, for sailing across the oceans is dangerous. But Lucy has her independence, her work, and his letters, and her enterprise flourishes; starting with bourgeois pupils, her establishment soon attracts a "higher class" and changes from an externat to a boarding school: "The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart."[126]

Epilogue

> That I am an agent, but also a plant; that much that I did not make goes towards making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods and that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to something or doing some wrong; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my life; that it is equally problematic to entrust one's good to friends, lovers, or country and to try to have a good life without them--all these I take to be not just the material of tragedy, but everyday facts of lived practical reason.[127]

Did Charlotte ever open a school? Did she find freedom, and love? Let me begin with the simpler question. In the company of Emily, Charlotte studied for a year in Brussels, seeing something of the grand old world of her dreams and returning to school, at the age of twenty-six, "with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass."[128] There was a M. Paul, only he was M. Heger, married to the head of the school. This professor taught his two extraordinary English pupils French through the study of literary masterpieces, helping them to appreciate the whole, analyze its parts, and examine each author's conception of truth, comparing and contrasting. Under his inspired, if autocratic direction, the sisters worked with great intellectual satisfaction until they returned to England when their aunt died. Charlotte returned to Brussels to learn German and teach English, getting on at Madame Heger's school "from day to day in a Robinson-Crusoe-like sort of way, very lonely."[129] Teaching was drudgery at worst; at best, conscientious exertion:

> She liked to learn, but hated to teach; her progress as a pupil depended upon herself . . . on herself she could calculate with certainty; her success as a teacher rested partly, perhaps chiefly, upon the will of others; it cost her a most painful effort to enter into conflict with this foreign will, to endeavour to bend it into subjection to her own; for in what regarded people in general the action of her will was impeded by many scruples; it was as unembarrassed as strong where her own affairs were concerned, and to it she could at any time subject her inclination, if that inclination went counter to her convictions of right; yet when called upon to wrestle with the propensities, the habits, the faults of others, of children especially, who are deaf to reason, and, for the most part, insensate to persuasion, her will sometimes almost refused to act; then came in the sense of duty, and forced the reluctant will into operation. A wasteful expense of energy and labour was frequently the consequence.[130]

Still Charlotte carried on, needing her small salary to live and the new learning for the school that was some day to be theirs. She decided to go home when it seemed that her father was going blind. To promote the sisters'

project, M. Heger gave Charlotte a teaching certificate, sealed with the seal of his college.

The parting from her friend and teacher was a great and lasting grief. Above all things Charlotte needed hard work and a stake in life; the thought of returning without making any progress was unbearable to her. However, the sisters' project had to wait because of Rev. Bronte's health. Then, no pupils could be found. Branwell's moral and mental decline as an alcoholic put an end to his sisters' plans, for his fits of viciousness and delirium tremens made the Parsonage a place unfit for strangers. Charlotte was forced to be relieved at the failure of their dreams, the barrenness of their efforts: "Her honest plan for earning her own livelihood had fallen away, crumbled to ashes; after all her preparations, not a pupil had offered herself; and, instead of being sorry that this wish of many years could not be realised, she had reason to be glad."[131] Although she now felt buried at home, she replied to an offer for work away from the Parsonage:

> Leave home!--I shall neither be able to find place nor employment, perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release.[132]

To all appearances defeated, the Bronte sisters reconstructed their hopes, obeying their deepest impulses. Their circumspect life plans had come to nothing. Their home had become a sad and frightening place. In a movement of return and transcendence that affirmed their love for one another, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne reverted to the life of the imagination, finding freedom and salutary work in writing. Since teaching was to them a matter of duty and necessity, not choice and enjoyment, one might say that the force of circumstances which had originally compelled them to teach saved them, in this new

configuration, from being and living in a false position. They hoped to make some money through their writings, but the work would sustain them, no matter what. As their genius asserted itself, their lives became divided between two roles: that of women and authors. Mrs. Gaskell points out that the duties belonging to each role were "not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled":

> When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him. He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or pursuit; he gives up something of the legal or medical profession in which he has hitherto endeavoured to serve others . . . and another . . . lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother.[133]

So the sisters assembled in the dining room, as of old, when everyone else had retired. Pacing up and down, they talked about their ideas and read from their writings; this took them "out of the pressure of daily-recurring cares, . . . setting them in a free place."[134] Under male pseudonyms, they jointly published a volume of poems and afterwards wrote their own novels: Anne's Agnes Grey, Emily's Wuthering Heights, and Charlotte's The Professor, and Jane Eyre, and the latter was a success.

Their father knew nothing about their work and when Bronte gave him Jane Eyre, he announced, "Girls, do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?"[135] His vision had improved after an operation, but Branwell had added opium to his other vices. Their brother's horrifying slow death was followed by Emily's rapid consumptive decline: "Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked at her with an anguish of wonder and love. . . . Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone."[136] In dying as in living more gentle, Anne soon followed Emily. A sense of bitterness and desolation took hold of Bronte; but in spite of everything, she wrote: "Crushed I am not, yet; nor robbed of

elasticity, nor of hope, nor quite of endeavour. I have some strength to fight the battle of life. I am aware, and can acknowledge that I have many comforts, many mercies. Still I can get on."[137]

Among Bronte's comforts were her wide reading, the growing correspondence with critics and other authors, occasional visits to London, and the formation of new friendships. Fighting ill-health and a debilitating oppression of spirits, lifted up and comforted by the exercise of her imagination, Bronte continued writing. For her last novel, Villette, Iris Murdoch's comment that: "Any story which we tell about ourselves consoles us since it imposes patterns upon something which might otherwise seem intolerably chancy and incomplete,"[138] seems particularly to the point. Yet when her work stood still, memory and imagination preyed upon Bronte. She was annoyed by unfair criticism, resenting the tendency of critics to judge her novels as "female productions," once their true authorship had been revealed. Now a woman of considerable information and fame, she saw but little change in the way men were regarding the position of women:

> A few men, whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong, think and speak of it with a candour that commands my admiration. They say however--and to an extent, truly--that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but, as certainly there are other evils--deep-rooted in the foundations of the social system--which no efforts of ours can touch: of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think.[139]

It is another of the ironies of Bronte's life that she found love, at last, in the Parsonage, and in the person of her father's curate--thus a member of a "troublesome race" mocked in her novels. Her new friends, including Mrs. Gaskell, were puzzled. However good and conscientious Mr. Nicholls might be, his tastes and thoughts were not congenial to Bronte, nor did she marry him with feelings warmer than esteem. Perhaps no one did grasp the extent and quality of Bronte's loneliness; as she remarked in Villette, "The world can

understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement."[140] Moreover, she was not a person to remain unmoved in the presence of passion and patient love. Mr. Nicholls had known her for eight years as a tenderly devoted, self-effacing daughter and sister, the mainstay of a household with many afflictions. When he finally declared himself, he was fearing rejection and shaking all over with the ardor of his feelings. Rev. Bronte's initial opposition subsided when he recognized his curate's earnest wish to comfort and assist him in his old age, together with Charlotte, who thus trusted that "the demands of both feeling and duty will be in some measure reconciled by the step in contemplation."[141]

Her marriage at almost forty brought a sudden and surprising happiness to Bronte.[142] This happiness depended on the discovery of her husband's character which itself unfolded in great tenderness under the influence of happiness. Of course, the curate expected his wife to share all aspects of his work, but, as we know from Villette, she rather liked to be ruled. Besides, the clergyman's daughter was well aware of the duties of a clergyman's wife. And Mr. Nicholls also listened attentively to the first chapters of a new novel Bronte had begun, although his many demands on her left very little time for writing. He was not hostile to her fame, yet to him it was "far from being the most important attribute of the woman he had married."[143] Sadly in keeping with her whole life, however, Bronte's love story ended tragically. Pregnant, she died of consumption after less than a year; coming to consciousness shortly before her death, she heard her husband's prayer that God would save her and whispered: "I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy."[144]

Ever since I first read Mrs. Gaskell's biography, I have mourned Bronte's death. It robbed two people of a happiness they had long ceased to expect from life. It cut off a career in which genius had finally gained freedom and recognition. Yet had she lived, how much time would Bronte have had for her writing? Does it follow that this woman ought not to have married or that her husband should have made no claims on her, treating the claims of her genius instead as absolute and indefeasible? I do not think so. These conclusions would presuppose a singleness of value scheme or, at least, a scheme of hierarchically ordered rather than conflicting values. As it happens, men have more frequently than women been able to arrange their lives in line with such assumptions--but this became possible because other people, often women, smoothed their path and made its rough places plain, putting aside personal desires and taking over obligations which lives characterized by "strategies of avoidance and simplification"[145] cannot encompass. Nor does it follow that such single-minded lives must be good lives. Below the surface of feminist questions arising from our reflections lie therefore questions concerning an adequate and defensible vision of human life. The point of these fundamental questions can be captured in the distinction between personal good and personal goodness.

If maximizing personal good were the issue, Bronte's heroic struggles to subdue her self and her longing for release, her attempts to obey and reconcile filial duty, sisterly love, and the requirements of necessity--mostly through taking on the teaching role for which she was unfit--must be shrugged off as misguided and wasteful. Had she cut herself loose from her family, seeking self-realization with the daring and determination she showed in pursuing the school project, she could have avoided the pains of a false position, in which her nature, desires, and, arguably, her attainments made her false to the

requirements of teaching. If it is personal goodness that matters, her struggles have meaning and justification, while the fact that teaching was the only way open to a woman in her position blunts the charge of (subjective) wrongdoing. No doubt she was a woman oppressed, and fate and the force of circumstances account for part of her tragedy. Yet another part was on account of her virtuous, penetrating consciousness of a world of discordant values. Although this is the world of ordinary moral life, the quality of her response to it makes good Mrs. Gaskell's claim that Charlotte Bronte was a woman of extraordinary genius and noble virtue.

From this vantage point, Timbermill's life takes on a different appearance. It did avoid the eternal shortcomings that are a consequence of rich value schemes. Life and choice are simpler where conflicting obligations are eliminated and natural or social ties restricted or abandoned. To the extent that existence is thus controlled, self-contained and harmonious, it is however, also impoverished. For Timbermill, scholarship was the overriding value, yet "a serious scholar who is also a good man knows not only his subject but the proper place of his subject in the whole of his life."[146] The geniality of a person not harassed by internal strife and uphill struggles is nevertheless attractive; Lucy experienced the benign appeal of Dr. John's sunny temper, while seeing its dependence on his nature, nurture, and good luck.[147] Both men had a sense of entitlement not belied by their circumstances and endowments. Bronte, dogged by ill-luck and hampered by her foibles and social position, responded to life in the "strenuous moral mood." As William James contends:

> The capacity for the strenuous mood probably lies slumbering in every man, but it . . . needs the wilder passions to arouse it, the big fears, loves, and indignations; or else the deeply penetrating appeal of some of the higher fidelities. . . . Strong relief is a necessity of its vision; and a world where all the mountains are brought down and all the valleys are exalted is not congenial place for its habitation.[148]

Our world has changed greatly since Villette's publication and Bronte's death. Still, teachers are no strangers to economic necessity and most of them are women. Although many critics expect teachers to approach their work in "the strenuous moral mood," the profession is not well respected. These expectations are partially justified by the nature of school teaching with its richly discordant value structure, as well as its particular historical difficulties, but it would be foolish to think that the basis of a mass occupation can be vocation, or that its majority can be composed of saints and heroes. And, given the dominance of women in the profession, we must recall that part of what it means to be the kind of person living the life of a teacher is being a woman, with the duties attendant upon that role. We should consider the paradox that many of the structural features of teaching which we regard as evils today--such as eased entry, low retention, flat careers--fit with the typically contingent lives of women, in which they coordinate their choices with the needs of others, needs which we cannot dismiss out of hand and which do not often find an easy union. Inside and outside of their work, teachers feel "the pinch of the ideal."

Footnotes

[1]Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (London: Ark paperbacks, 1985) p.34.

[2]J. I. M. Stewart, A Staircase in Surrey (London: Methuen London Ltd., 1983)

[3]Stewart, "Young Patullo," vol. II of A Staircase in Surrey, p. 112.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Stewart, "Young Patullo," p. 113.

[6]Stewart, "Young Patullo," pp. 277-278.

[7]Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Bronte (New York: Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1919), p. 286; (First published 1857)

[8]May Sinclair, "Introduction," Life, p. xiv.

[9]Life, pp. 340-341.

[10]Dan C. Lortie, Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[11]Charlotte Bronte, Villette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); (First published 1853)

[12]Life, p. 286.

[13]Life, p. 367.

[14]Charlotte Bronte, The Professor (West Drayton, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1948; first published 1857.)

[15]Margaret Lane, The Bronte Story: A Reconsideration of Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte (Glasgow, Scotland: Fontana Books, 1978).

[16]These points parallel those Martha Nussbaum makes in her arguments for turning to poetry in ethical investigations; see Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 13-16.

[17]See, e.g., Hilary Putnam, "Literature, Science, and Reflection," in Meaning and the Moral Sciences (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974), pp. 83-96; Iris Murdoch and Bryan Magee, "Philosophy and Literature: Dialogue with Iris Murdoch" in Men of Ideas, ed. Bryan Magee (New York: Viking Press, 1978), pp. 264-284; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals: James's The Golden Bowl and Literature as Moral Philosophy," New Literary History 15(Autumn 1983): 25-50; see also, Martin Price, Forms of Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

For literary criticism of Villette from a variety of perspectives, germane to the issues I focus on, see Robert Colby, "Lucy Snowe and the Good Governess" in Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth Century Novels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 178-212; Nancy Cowley Hoar, "And My Ending is Despair: Villette--Charlotte Bronte's Valediction," Bronte Society Transactions 16 (June 1973): 185-191; Andrew D. Hook, "Charlotte Bronte, the Imagination, and Villette," in The Brontes: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Gregor (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 137-156.; Clara Lederer, "Little God-Sister," The Trollopian 2 (Dec. 1947): 169-175; Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 140-147; and Carolyn V. Platt, "How Feminist is Villette?" Women and Literature 3 (1975): 16-27.

[18]Life, p. 91.

[19]Life, p. 4.

[20]Life, p. 21.

[21]Life, p. 56.

[22]Life, p. 68.

[23]Life, p. 59.

[24]Life, p. 38.

[25]Life, p. 47.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Life, p. 45.

[28]Life, p. 61.

[29]Lane, The Bronte Story, pp. 83-84.

[30]Life, p. 66.

[31]Life, p. 68.

[32]Life, p. 69.

[33]Life, p. 89.

[34]Life, p. 78.

[35]Life, p. 95.

[36]Life, p. 94.

[37]Life, p. 134.

[38]Life, p. 94.

[39]*Life*, p. 97.

[40]*Life*, p. 96.

[41]*Ibid*.

[42]*Life*, p. 119.

[43]*Life*, p. 112.

[44]*Life*, p. 90.

[45]*Life*, p. 106.

[46]*Life*, p. 117.

[47]*Life*, pp. 121-122.

[48]*Life*, p. 137.

[49]*Life*, pp. 138-139.

[50]*Life*, p. 134.

[51]*Life*, p. 139.

[52]*Life*, p. 107.

[53]*Life*, p. 140.

[54]*Life*, p. 143.

[55]*Life*, p. 139.

[56]*Life*, p. 142.

[57]*Life*, p. 144.

[58]*Villette*, pp. 454-455.

[59]*Villette*, p. 34.

[60]*Villette*, pp. 42-43.

[61]*Ibid*.

[62]*Villette*, p. 53.

[63]*Villette*, p. 64.

[64]*Villette*, p. 59.

[65]*Villette*, p. 60.

[66]Villette, p. 63.

[67]Villette, p. 65.

[68]Villette, p. 68.

[69]Villette, p. 70.

[70]Villette, pp. 102-103.

[71]Villette, p. 71.

[72]Villette, p. 129.

[73]Villette, p. 74.

[74]Villette, p. 76.

[75]Villette, p. 77.

[76]Villette, p. 92.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Villette, p. 94.

[79]Villette, p. 128.

[80]Villette, p. 105.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Villette, pp. 105-106.

[83]Villette, p. 173.

[84]Villette, p. 117.

[85]Villette, p. 150.

[86]Villette, p. 152.

[87]Villette, p. 138.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Villette, p. 153.

[90]Villette, p. 154.

[91]Villette, p. 156.

[92]Villette, p. 158.

[93]Villette, pp. 161-162.

[94]Villette, p. 166.

[95]Villette, p. 170.

[96]Villette, p. 175.

[97]Villette, p. 178.

[98]Villette, p. 179.

[99]Villette, p. 176.

[100]Villette, p. 194.

[101]Villette, p. 195.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Villette, p. 207.

[104]Villette, p. 196.

[105]Villette, p. 197.

[106]Villette, pp. 197-198.

[107]Villette, p. 200.

[108]Villette, p. 222.

[109]Villette, p. 229.

[110]Villette, p. 236.

[111]Villette, p. 253.

[112]Villette, p. 296.

[113]Villette, p. 298.

[114]Villette, p. 308.

[115]Villette, p. 334.

[116]Villette, p. 337.

[117]Villette, p. 351.

[118]Villette, p. 354.

[119]The Professor, p. 130; in this work, Charlotte's self-observations and self-analyses are voiced by two of its main characters: the professor, who

is the narrator, and his pupil, a lace-mender aspiring to be a teacher. It details their pedagogical relations from the perspective of the professor, whereas Villette examines the emotional development in the relations of the two comparable main characters from the perspective of the woman-pupil. Charlotte's self-involvement in writing this first novel is considerable; thus she has the lace-mender, now heading a school, say about a friend called "Lucia": "I am sure Lucia once wore chains and broke them . . . . The race is that of one who has made an effort, and a successful and triumphant effort, to wrest some vigorous and valued faculty from insupportable constraint; and when Lucia's faculty got free, I am certain it spread wide pinions" (p. 249).

[120]Villette, pp. 400-401.

[121]Villette, see pp. 379-380.

[122]Villette, p. 446.

[123]Villette, p. 451.

[124]For a perceptive analysis of this extraordinary episode, see Hook, "Charlotte Bronte, the Imagination, and Villette", pp. 137-156.

[125]Villette, p. 485.

[126]Villette, p. 493.

[127]Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, pp. 34-35, 47.

[128]Life, p. 152.

[129]Life, p. 172.

[130]The Professor, p. 125.

[131]Life, p. 189.

[132]Life, p. 216.

[133]Life, p. 238.

[134]Life, p. 215.

[135]Life, p. 230.

[136]Life, p. 256.

[137]Life, p. 275.

[138]Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good, p. 87.

[139]Life, p. 313.

[140]Villette, p. 273.

[141]Life, p. 392.

[142]See, Bronte Story, Ch. 15.

[143]Bronte Story, p. 304.

[144]Life, p. 400.

[145]See, Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness, especially Ch. 3, "Sophocles' Antigone: conflict, vision, and simplification," for a searching treatment of the assumptions and consequences surrounding a singleness of value scheme.

[146]The Sovereignty of Good, p. 97.

[147]Villette, see pp. 249, 260, 271, and, especially, p. 318.

[148]William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," in The Moral Philosophy of William James, ed. John K. Roth (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), p. 189.